



Northern Great Plains Network

Inventory and Monitoring Monthly Report

September 2004



Water Quality Project: The 2004 field work for the water quality project has been completed (two visits per park: one more visit will be conducted next year). Most of the results from the outside labs have been received. The SDSU technicians are currently working on identifying the macro-invertebrates (using EPA protocols) as well as other components of the project. We will get an update on the project and the results at this winter's annual I&M meeting.

I&M Network Board: As described in our Network Charter, the beginning of a new fiscal year means new membership on the I&M Network Board of Directors. Starting October 1, the term for the Badlands NP Superintendent expires and the Superintendent of Wind Cave NP joins the Board for a 3-year term. The Superintendent of Agate Fossil Beds NM is now the Board Chairperson. The Board of Directors is the entity responsible for overseeing the I&M Program.

I&M Program Personnel: Effective in early September, both Erin Handberg (our STEP hire working on web page and computer issues) and Mike Bynum (our seasonal Biological Technician) were converted to Intermittent status. This works for both of them and is the only way I could keep them on due to our FY05 funding uncertainties. Their hours will be greatly reduced until we receive a budget.

FY04 Expenditures: The books are closed on FY04. In last fiscal year we were allocated \$199k in inventory funds and \$150k in monitoring (actual amounts were slightly less after assessments). Approximately 53% was spent on I&M Program personnel, 26% on contractors, 10% on major purchases (i.e., the satellite imagery and a plotter), 6% on travel (60% of that was for the Data Manager PCS), and the remaining 5% on miscellaneous items. A more detailed report of expenditures will be in the Northern Great Plains I&M Network Annual Administrative Report and Work Plan which I will be starting on shortly.

Visit by USGS-BRD Jamestown Director: Dr. Jay Hestbeck, Center Director of the USGS-BRD Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Jamestown, ND, visited with NPS personnel on September 14, at Mt. Rushmore NMEM. The purpose of the visit was to review the USGS-BRD Black Hills Field Station, i.e., Amy Symstad's operations. Everyone present expressed great satisfaction with the arrangement. The I&M Program has benefited greatly from Amy's presence as have several of the parks.

NGPN I&M Web Page: The Northern Great Plains I&M web page now has images stored. The images include pictures of the parks, the field inventories, and miscellaneous wildlife shots. More images will be added in the near future and, hopefully, the image archive will be searchable. The images can be found at:

<http://www1.nature.nps.gov/im/units/ngpn/Pages/Publications/photoArchive.htm>

Miscellaneous: An important feature of the pre-Columbian Northern Great Plains ecosystem was its vastness. This vastness allowed the ecological drivers in the region, i.e., fire, grazing, and even weather, to create a mosaic of habitats across the landscape. For example, fires often burned in a patchy pattern, affecting some sites but leaving others. Species native to the Great Plains are well adapted to survive and prosper in such a dynamic and heterogeneous landscape. For example, fires may have extirpated less-mobile species from a site (e.g., skipper butterflies, beetles, some herps), but populations which survived in nearby unburnt areas could later recolonize the burnt sites. While our larger parks can sometimes replicate these patchy landscapes and processes, doing so becomes a challenge in our smaller parks. As a rule of thumb, we should always avoid burning an entire prairie, grazing an entire park at a uniform intensity, or creating an even-aged forest. However, this rule needs to be reconciled with the fact that some species are area-dependent and require habitats of certain size to meet their life needs, and with conditions immediately outside the parks.